

**Rev. 12 (Overview and vv.1-6)**  
**August 5, 1994**  
**H. Van Dyke Parunak**

**Overview**

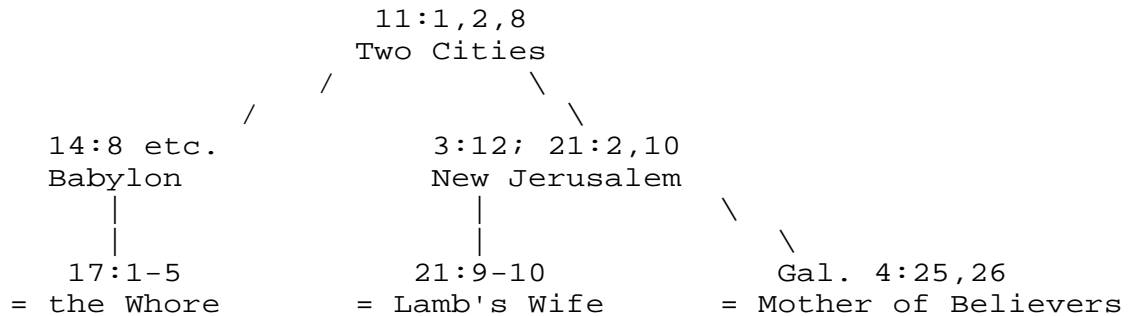
1. 11:15-19 and ch. 15 together form the heavenly vision of the seventh trumpet that unfolds into the seven vials of ch. 16. Their similarity suggests that they are an external inclusio, and that ch. 12-14 are parenthetical. *Alternative: Just as 11B and 15 correspond, so 12:1-3 and 16:1 both introduce "signs." Do we have an alternation?*
2. 12-14 in turn consist of a summary (12:1-6, today's study) and an amplification (12:7-ch.14). Both center around two heavenly signs, the radiant woman (12:1) and the dragon (12:3), and the conflict between them.
3. The amplification of the conflict passes through three stages. The latter stages emphasize the judgment to fall on the dragon and his forces, leading to the third sign in 15:1, the angel bringing the last judgments.
4. These three signs in heaven are the only items so designated in the book, and show us the point of the verb "signified" in 1:1. They are graded in their importance.
  - a) Least among them is the dragon, called simply a "sign." He is Satan (v.9), the accuser of God's people, who wishes to usurp the place of the Lord Jesus as king of creation.
  - b) The woman is a "great sign." The astral symbolism takes us back to Gen. 37:9,10. The sun and moon are Jacob and Rachel; the twelve stars are the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. --> The woman represents in some sense the people of God. More later.
  - c) The plague angels in 15:1 are a "great and marvellous sign."
  - d) Here, then, is a biblical outline of history. God's enemy seeks in his wrath to destroy God's people, but will one day himself be destroyed.

**A. 1-2, The Woman**

1. Gen. 37:9,10 makes a strong case for identifying her in some way with Israel.
2. As the scene opens, she is about to bear a son. The reference in v.5 to Psalm 2 shows that this is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. John's vision thus begins before the NT.
3. Later (v.17), we learn that she has other children as well. These are not just any Israelites, but those who "keep the commandments

of God, and have the testimony of Jesus." (NB: not only do we have the same Father as the Lord Jesus, but also the same mother! Thus "he is not ashamed to call them 'brethren'," Heb. 2:11.)

4. Consider the wider scheme of symbols in the book.



- a) 11:1,2,8 introduced the distinction between the two cities, later to be introduced as Babylon and Jerusalem.
- b) 17:1-5 pictures Babylon as a great whore.
- c) 21:9,10 pictures Jerusalem as "the bride, the Lamb's wife."
- d) Recall Paul's imagery in Gal. 4:25,26, in which heavenly Jerusalem is contrasted with Jerusalem which now is, and is depicted as "the mother of us all." (The most embarrassing verse in the Bible to a strict dispensationalism.)

5. Thus take the woman as the new Jerusalem, the true Israel of God:

- a) the vehicle through which the Messiah came
- b) the mother of all true believers in every age
- c) the perennial target of Satan and his hosts.

6. *Application*: Don't take Satan's opposition personally! The servant is not greater than his Lord; we can expect no better treatment at the Devil's hands than Christ received. That condemns us no more than it does our Lord; in fact, it shows how closely bound we are to him, if we so share his sufferings.

## B. 3-4a, The Dragon

1. 3, Heads and horns:

- a) Shows his close relation to the beast from the sea, 13:1, who in turn (at least in the horns) reflects Daniel's fourth beast (Dan. 7:7, 20). Daniel sees the beast; John shows us the dragon behind the beast.
- b) 17:10,11 interprets the seven heads as *successive* world empires, to be succeeded by the beast himself. These have plausibly been interpreted as Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome [concurrent with John], Christendom. Neb's vision in Dan. 2 skips over the first two and merges the last two.
- c) 17:12 interprets the ten horns as kings who rule *concurrently* with the beast.

d) These heads and horns are borne by the dragon, not just by the beast. Satan is the one behind every dominant world empire down to this present day, and in every age he has tried to destroy the people of God.

2. 4a, Tail dragging down the stars of heaven:

a) At the least, depicts the size and power of the dragon. So big that he even bumps the stars out of heaven when he moves.

b) May refer to the angels of Gen. 6, who acc. to Jude 6 "kept not their first estate," but cohabited with humans (perhaps via demon possession). (NB: we don't have many details of Satan's original sin and what impact it had on the other angels; most of our ideas are derived more from Milton's *Paradise Lost* than from the scriptures.)

### C. 4b-6, Summary of their Struggle

An excellent example of how prophecy foreshortens time to bring together the high points.

1. 4b, The Dragon seeks to ambush Messiah.

This effort extends throughout the entire history of the world, ever since the promise of the seed of the woman. (See Bullinger, *The Apocalypse*, 400-402.)

a) Gen. 6, sought to pollute the line with demons. Only Noah and his family survive.

b) Exod. 1, Pharaoh seeks to kill off Israel

c) 2 Chron. 21, 22. Jehoram kills off all his brothers, and all his sons are slain by the Arabians, except Ahaziah. Athaliah slew all his sons, but Jehoiada the priest delivered Joash.

d) Esther. Haman seeks to kill off the entire nation.

e) Matt. 2. Herod kills off the eligible candidates.

f) During Christ's life,

1) Satan's temptation to cast himself down

2) people of Nazareth try to throw him off the hill

3) two storms on the Sea of Galilee

4) attempt in John 9 to stone him in the temple

5) All comes to a head on Calvary, but "God raised him from the dead."

2. 5a, Messiah is born. The quotation from Ps. 2 clearly identifies him; cf. 19:15, when he returns again from heaven. Time: about 2 B.C.

3. 5b, Messiah is snatched away to heaven (to return in ch. 19). Time: about A.D. 33.

4. 6, Believers flee to a divinely prepared refuge.

a) Presumes opposition by the dragon: the sufferings that God's people have endured throughout the centuries, first from the Romans, then at the hands of the Roman Catholic institution,

and under totalitarian governments of every description.

- b) Once again, the 1260 days that we have seen already in 11:3. A particular intensification of this opposition. Second half of Daniel's 70th week, from Dan. 9:27, when the desolator breaks his covenant with the nation and sets up the abomination of desolation.

### **Summary**

1. Remember the "sign," the Dragon. Expect opposition and persecution. He's been at it for six thousand years; don't expect him to quit now.
2. Remember the "great sign," the Woman. You are not alone. The opposition you face is not directed at you, but at your mother, the New Jerusalem, and it is shared by all your spiritual siblings, beginning with the LJC.
3. Remember the "great and marvellous sign," the seven angels of judgment. God will not let this go on forever. He will set the wrongs right, lock up Satan, and bring us to enjoy our heavenly inheritance.